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Subject Greenwire: Mine promoters say EPA is ignoring them

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## Mine promoters say EPA is ignoring them

Manuel Quinones, E&E reporter

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Promoters of a proposed gold and copper mine in southwest Alaska say U.S. EPA isn't paying enough attention to their concerns and want more time to provide comments on the agency's study of mining's environmental impacts in the Bristol **Bay** watershed.

EPA's draft study released last month says the Pebble Limited Partnership's mine would likely pose a threat to the watershed and its thriving commercial salmon fishery.

A Pebble contractor, Lisa Reimers, CEO of Iliamna Development Corp., said EPA won't listen to mining supporters.

"We came to [Washington, D.C.] to try to meet with [EPA Administrator Lisa] Jackson; again, she failed to meet with us, she refused to meet with us," Reimers said in an interview last week. "We're beginning to think this is deliberate."

Reimers was accompanied by Trefon Angasan, board chairman of Alaska Peninsula Corp., a grouping of Alaska Native villages. He has also been a consultant to Pebble on regional and native issues.

EPA recently held eight community meetings on the draft watershed assessment. But Angasan complains that more of them weren't close to Iliamna and Newhalen, where his corporation has land and which are near the potential mine site. They are also upset with Jackson's 2010 visit to Dillingham, seen as a mine opposition stronghold.

"We should have a consultation established with the EPA, and we don't," Angasan said, complaining about the lack of high-level consultation required for federally recognized tribes. "We have been excluded from the development of that watershed assessment."

EPA's comment period on the draft assessment runs through July 23. Alaska Attorney General Michael Geraghty (R) is calling for a delay until November.

"In short, this is a voluminous amount of complex information that requires thorough public review and comment," Geraghty told the agency in a recent letter. "As EPA is well aware, normally such information for a specific proposed project takes several years to gather and be scientifically vetted and scrutinized by multiple state and federal agencies, which has not occurred here."

Angasan said, "Right now, our people are gathering, they are fishing, they're getting ready to fill their freezers for the summer so they can survive the winter. And they don't have time to put everything aside."

EPA is considering an extension of the comment period. It is also defending its consultation with stakeholders like Reimers and Angasan -- who have attended meetings with top EPA officials. A spokeswoman said agency leaders had more more than 20 visits to 11 villages.

"EPA made public and stakeholder engagement a top priority when the assessment was launched," a spokeswoman said. "EPA has reached out to Bristol **Bay** stakeholders, including native corporations, and offered information, briefings and meetings to discuss the assessment. EPA continues to be available for meetings as the assessment proceeds."

## Politics

Jason Metrokin, CEO of Bristol **Bay** Native Corp., said the calls for delay are a political stalling tactic. In a recent letter to EPA, he provided examples of how the agency's comment period is comparable to those for other mining projects.

"It's fairly egregious too when you consider the fact that nine tribes in Bristol Bay, the Bristol Bay Native Corporation, the Bristol **Bay** Native Association, we have asked and supported the EPA to do this watershed assessment," Metrokin said.

BBNC tallied comments at all EPA hearings and found more than 80 percent support the EPA assessment. Support for the agency was weaker in Anchorage at about 45 percent, and Nondalton, north of Iliamna, at about 79 percent of those who testified.

"I'm here to tell you that the Alaska Native people in Bristol **Bay** had the opportunity to speak on this issue," he added. "There is ample opportunity to read the report."

Metrokin met with EPA leaders this week and lobbied both sides of aisle at the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee. Chairman Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) has asked the Obama administration for documents and is looking into the matter.

Native Alaskans and corporation leaders are locked in a debate over what will better secure the

region's economic future -- the salmon fishery, a large mine or both. While Angasan and Reimers are optimistic that the mine would be able to coexist with the salmon, Metrokin is not so sure.

"This is a project that is so unique and significant in size that it will have an effect on waters of the U.S.," he said. "And EPA has a role to play."

With EPA not ruling out issuing a pre-emptive veto of a key Army Corps of Engineers permit for the mine, agency critics worry about economic development and the future of other projects.

"This could create cultural genocide," Reimers said, "because we won't have an economy and won't be able to live there."

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